

Illinois U Library

ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

Official Publication of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English

Vol. 38, No. 8

Urbana, Illinois

May, 1951

Published every month except June, July, August, and September. Subscription price, \$2.00 per year; single copies, 25 cents. *Entered as second-class matter October 29, 1941, at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879.* Communications may be addressed to J. N. Hook, 121 Lincoln Hall, Urbana, Illinois.

The Importance of Literature in Our Culture

RADIO TALK OVER STATION WILL

By JOHN T. FLANAGAN

Professor of English, University of Illinois

From the point of view of history America is a young nation, and in comparison with the writing of other countries ours is a young literature. Yet the literature we have produced is by no means unimportant to ourselves or insignificant in world perspective. Writers like Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Henry James, Sinclair Lewis, Robert Frost, have rightfully taken their places in the literary pantheon. Moreover, in the period of time—now more than a century and a half—in which we have been politically independent, our writers and books have become increasingly important and increasingly typical of our own land.

The best that a European could say in the past of an American book was that it was an imitation of something foreign. Thus, Bryant was the American Wordsworth, Cooper was the American Scott, Irving was the American Addison. But when Poe and Whitman and Mark Twain came along the parallels ran out. Poe's short stories had no analogues abroad, and Whitman and Twain were personalities unique to the western world. In the twentieth century, as a matter of fact, the phenomenon occurs in reverse so that titles like the French Hemingway and the Italian Faulkner are not impossible. But more to the point, where Jack London

and Upton Sinclair were once widely read abroad because of their sharp criticism of American capitalism, Europeans today read Sinclair Lewis and Thomas Wolfe and Robert Frost because they want to learn something about American life, and because they are impressed by the literary skill and freshness of this new crop of trans-Atlantic authors. No country in the world has produced a more vigorous, more exciting literature in the twentieth century than has the United States. It would be strange indeed if that literature had no impact upon the culture of the land which spawned it.

As a matter of fact, American literature has had a vitally important role in the development of American culture, and a role which is growing instead of shrinking. The increased literacy of the people, the vast circulation of magazines, the popularity of books in inexpensive reprints, all these factors suggest the great value of the printed word in spreading ideas and shaping beliefs. When the Sunday edition of the most distinguished newspaper in the country reaches more than a million homes, and when our better slick-paper magazines reach a circulation of more than five million apiece, it is not hard to realize the effect of popular writing on the mores of the people.

The peculiar economic and publishing conditions of our country underscore the point in another way. For example, a popular book like Margaret Mitchell's historical novel of the Civil War, *Gone With the Wind*, sells widely even without book club support. Such a book even before appearance within hard covers might possibly be serialized in a large circulation magazine. After a certain currency there, it is reprinted cheaply for a larger market. Unless its length is a preventive factor it might even appear eventually in a twenty-five cent paper-cover book. It could well be dramatized for Broadway production or abbreviated into a radio script. Almost certainly it will end up in Hollywood, probably suffering a horrible sea-change in the process, but nevertheless appealing through the movie version to larger and newer audiences. By this time, through repetition, allusion, discussion, its plot and characters have become a firm part of the American scene. People who have never heard of Mrs. Mitchell and who have never seen her book know something about Rhett Butler and Scarlet O'Hara; indeed these characters have become almost folk figures. I admit that my example is an extreme case but it is not unique. In such fashion is a folklore built and a culture enriched. Literature plays many roles.

Broadly speaking, it is possible to name *four* particular ways in which American literature affects and even to some extent

shapes American culture. There are of course other influences, but these *four* seem most important.

1. Our literature helps us to gain a better notion of the world we live in and especially of our own country. Despite the geographical shrinkage produced by better communication and travel, America is still a vast, complex, variegated land. Our books help to reveal us to ourselves.

2. Our literature helps us to know the American past. We are far away from the original period of exploration and settlement, far away from the critical era when our government was formed, far away even from the first tensions of the new land. We are closer to the Civil War and to the arrival of immigrants in large numbers from abroad. But time has inserted such a gap between all these events and our life today that it is hard to understand them unless we can project ourselves backwards.

3. Our literature helps us to fathom human nature, to get clues to human personality, to see resemblances even between such widely different internationalists as Benjamin Franklin and Franklin D. Roosevelt. It teaches us that basic problems change little although circumstances vary, and that man in the past has weathered crises even blacker than those today by idealism, faith, and tenacity.

4. Our literature introduces us to new ideas and produces thereby both tolerance and insight. It suggests solutions as well as problems, it gives solace as well as stimulation. The nineteenth century was commonly marked by individualism and optimism; the twentieth century has been called the century of collectivism and pessimism. But neither century has written *finis* to man's achievements. It is better to assimilate and adjust than to perish.

I should like to elaborate a little on each of these points.

I

First, American literature produces a better knowledge of the world we live in. Despite the tremendous extension of human powers even during our own life time, there are insuperable limits to what any single man can experience. He cannot *know* or *do* or *see* all that is to be *known* or *done* or *seen* in the modern world. His time and energy have limits; his life-span is not infinite. Thus, he must depend on other sources than his own activities for knowledge of many of the things that happen around him. If he asks intelligent questions, books will provide many of the answers.

Suppose that a young man wishes to learn something of the life of various professional men. If medicine interests him, he might well turn to Sinclair Lewis's fine novel of a medical research worker, *Arrowsmith*, to Helen Clapesattle's collective biography entitled *The Doctors Mayo*, to Paul De Kruif's exciting *Microbe Hunters*. Such books will not make a doctor out of a layman, but they will reveal more about the personal and scientific life of a doctor than any number of catalogues listing college courses. Suppose, again, that a young man is curious about teaching. There are numerous accounts by great educators to which he could profitably go, but nothing reveals more about the daily problems of the classroom than Jacques Barzun's humorous and adroitly written *Teacher in America*. For anyone thinking about a career in physical science there is the autobiography of Robert Millikan, or the life of Willard Gibbs by Muriel Rukeyser, or the earlier writings of John Fiske. If publishing and journalism have the chief appeal, one can go to the story of the New York publisher Henry Holt, to Vincent Sheean's *Personal History*, to the autobiographies of such great journalists as Lincoln Steffens and William Allen White. If a military career is a young man's goal, the memoirs of the great soldiers from Robert E. Lee and U. S. Grant to Mark Clark and Dwight D. Eisenhower will provide valuable data. No matter what the field of interest, business, engineering, politics, sports, law, the autobiographies of the men who have been most conspicuously successful will show much of the training necessary, the problems encountered, the rewards and goals and sacrifices.

Let us assume again that a resident of an inland community becomes curious about some other section of the country. The simplest thing, of course, would be to pull up stakes and move there, but the simplest thing is not always the easiest. In the meanwhile, books can tell him much that he could learn otherwise only from hard and bitter experience. It is unlikely that the migratory farm workers of the depression era ever pondered the fate of the Joad family in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, yet reading that novel would have given a useful picture of economic conditions in the interior valleys of California. Two other novels by Steinbeck, *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*, picture with equal sharpness the casual life of the people of mixed race and uncertain income who populate the California coast around Monterey. William Saroyan's short stories about Armenians and Sidney Howard's play, *They Knew What They Wanted*, about Italian wine growers sketch other racial groups in the Golden

State. An earlier San Francisco still lives in the novels of Frank Norris and Jack London, and the mining camps of the gold rush still seem alive in the short stories of Bret Harte.

Indeed twentieth century American literature is so rich in regional scenes that one need travel no further than a good public library to learn much about life in the mid-west farming communities, in Georgia and Florida and Virginia, in the southwest, in New England. Let Ruth Suckow report on the life of the Iowa farmer, let Louis Bromfield speak for Ohio, let William Faulkner describe some of the oddities of human behavior in the Mississippi back country, let Jesse Stuart picture the Kentucky hills and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings the Florida swamplands and Sinclair Lewis the Minnesota small towns. These observers are accurate and vivid although they may range from sympathy to satire. Their details make them good journalists, but they also have imagination and an eye for atmosphere as well as literal transcription. And if it is the big city, rather than the countryside, which fascinates, literature again provides the magnifying glass. Who can forget Carl Sandburg's picture of Chicago,

"Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler ;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders . . . "

Who can forget John Dos Passos's profile of New York, or Edith Wharton's sketch of an older Gotham, or John Marquand's amusing glimpse of Boston as it was in the days of the late George Apley?

But there are aspects besides the physical which writers, and especially novelists, can interpret superlatively well. Literature reveals in dramatic fashion the plight of minority groups, the shortcomings of our economic system, the banality of the commercial spirit. In recent years Chicago in particular has been observed and analyzed by novelists, by Nelson Algren in his stories of Poles and Jews, by Richard Wright in his depiction of the Negro, by James Farrell in his portraits of the South Side Irish in the Studs Lonigan series and other volumes. Social criticism was sincere and forthright in the fiction of Robert Herrick; in such a novel as Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* it becomes eloquent. Plays like Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing* and Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End* are honest indictments of a derelict society.

This is not to say that expert reporting necessarily makes for great literature. Literary art is more than photography, and details must be universal as well as specific. But the great reporters of our recent literature, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, to some extent Thomas Wolfe, can extend our horizons amazingly. Through their intense interest in various kinds of existence we can figuratively leap out of ourselves and project our persons into a hundred different places and lives. *That is one great service of American literature today.*

II

Second, American literature in similar fashion teaches us the past. Novels, verse, drama can recreate our history in a way that textbooks and special studies try vainly to achieve. An American historian has called a narrative poem, Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body*, the best history of the Civil War ever written. Plays like Sidney Kingsley's *The Patriots*, with its fascinating sketch of the personalities of Jefferson and Hamilton, or Robert Sherwood's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, bring famous men to life in an unforgettable way. Even the best historical writing, in volumes like *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* and *The Oregon Trail* by Francis Parkman, owes much of its success to the ability of the narrator to tell a dramatic story and paint a vivid picture.

Nor will the wise reader overlook the historical novel, despite deprecatory remarks about its shallow emphasis on costume and melodrama. Cooper's novels are still exciting accounts of forest warfare or battles between individual ships on the high seas. *The Last of the Mohicans* remains a tense story solidly set among the woods and lakes and frontier forts of upstate New York, just as the glamorous figure of John Paul Jones is vigorously recreated in *The Pilot*. Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* has fewer specific details of colonial life than one might desire but remains to this day an unsurpassed interpretation of Puritan psychology and mores. The Salem of maritime importance comes to life in *The House of the Seven Gables* but even more colorfully in Joseph Hergesheimer's *Java Head*.

To most Americans, moreover, the Mississippi is Mark Twain's river. Reams of figures and footnotes cannot begin to impress the great Father of Waters on the American consciousness as Twain did in his stories of Huck Finn, Nigger Jim, and Tom Sawyer, or in his nostalgic chronicle, *Life on the Mississippi*. This same

magical recapturing of the past appears in Maurice Thompson's romantic novel of the Wabash Valley, *Alice of Old Vincennes*, and in Winston Churchill's panorama of St. Louis life during the Civil War, *The Crisis*. Equally successful was Frank Norris in his grandiose plan to write a trilogy about wheat, even though the last novel was never finished. *The Octopus* is an epic account of the planting and harvesting of the grain, and *The Pit* transfers the story to the Chicago wheat exchange where speculators try to corner the market only to end in colossal failure.

Many novelists have exploited, too, the advance of the American frontier, that mythical line of civilization which in the hands of Professor Frederick Jackson Turner became the basis for a great theory of history. One thinks of Edna Ferber's *Cimarron*, an exciting tale of the opening of the Oklahoma territory to settlement, of Emerson Hough's *Covered Wagon* and Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, of Vardis Fisher's account of the Mormon exodus to Utah in his *Children of God*, or A. B. Guthrie's more recent *The Big Sky* and *The Way West*. In all of these stories the pace is fast and the color is high. But accuracy, a sense of fitness, a genuine attempt to portray characters who no matter what their features or costumes are essentially human, make the effect plausible.

But literature can evoke the past in less panoramic ways. Those who know what it is to cross the Atlantic in a luxury liner or to fly across lands so distant that the whole perspective is cloud-rimmed often forget the hardships of travel in another day. But turn to Richard Henry Dana for a graphic picture of life before the mast on a ship rounding Cape Horn, or travel with Herman Melville in his novel *White-Jacket* on a frigate bound on a peaceful but rigorous voyage from Honolulu to Boston. Let those who think that fear of battle is a modern neurosis return to Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, a marvelous reconstruction of combat psychology written by a youth who had never seen a war. Let Willa Cather tell the story of the Catholic missionaries who converted the Indians of New Mexico and built a cathedral at Santa Fe, or read O. E. Rolvaag's account in his magnificent *Giants in the Earth* of Per Hansa's caravan, watching the Norwegian fishermen who had known only fjords and the sea learn to farm the Dakota prairies and to battle fire, grasshoppers, and blizzards. If the protagonists of these stories are simple people, they are none the less heroic. To know them increases one's sense of human stature.

III

Third, American literature can do more than reveal time and place; by exposing the problems and sufferings of others, it can help us to conquer our own doubts and fears. By bringing us understanding it can produce tolerance. By laying bare the souls of men beset by various difficulties it can bring to us a more complete self-knowledge. I do not refer, of course, to clinical records and diagnoses. On a scientific level there will always be case histories and Kinsey reports. I mean rather that imaginative or meditative literature to which a reader can always turn for insight into many kinds of human behavior, some of them far from his own ken but all tending to enrich his experience and sympathy. Here fiction, especially the fiction of the psychological narrators, is especially valuable, but so also are the self-revelations of writers, educators, journalists, philosophers.

A century and more ago Hawthorne showed the significance of projecting himself, and his readers, into the hearts and souls of the Puritans even if they had existence only on the printed page. Hester Prynne's indictment in *The Scarlet Letter* and her triumph over public punishment for a sin of which she deemed herself not guilty still provide a fascinating picture of the workings of the human conscience. And Donatello in *The Marble Faun* still exemplifies starkly the role that evil plays in moral maturity. Similar problems of education and judgment are dealt with by Henry James in such novels as *The Ambassadors* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, and by such novelists in the Jamesian tradition as Edith Wharton and Ellen Glasgow. In recent years the revolt against the small town produced books like *Main Street* and the *Spoon River Anthology* with their attack on provincialism and frustration in satirical overstatement. But it also brought forth Sherwood Anderson's amazing book of grotesques, *Winesburg, Ohio*, where without hatred and cynicism the author probed deeply into the hearts of the maladjusted and the neurotic. Among recent American writers of fiction Anderson, despite his formlessness and repetition, seems to have had the deepest knowledge of human character.

Great autobiography, which is more than a mere chronicle of fact, can be equally revealing, for here in almost sublimated form the superior human minds display their wrestlings with problems which seldom either change or disappear. One thinks of Benjamin Franklin, the poor son of a Boston chandler, making his way slowly but with deliberate conviction, and late in life recording for

posterity the way to success. Franklin's life is the great prudential autobiography of all time, the work of a man who shaped his life by principles of reason, caution, and sanity but who was honest enough to mirror his faults and sins as well as his triumphs. Mastering a fortune in early life but never being mastered by it, he devoted the rest of his years to public affairs and to scientific experiment from which both his own country and the world profited. His book is a superb portrayal of the very age of reason in which it was produced.

Very different is the *Education of Henry Adams*, the incomplete and not always candid confession of a highly educated man who denied that he was educated, the paradoxical story of a brilliant mind who won wide acclaim for his genius but found no permanent place in politics, journalism, teaching, or public administration. Adams constantly saw limitations and weaknesses, constantly sought a unifying principle. The Middle Ages had such a focus in the cult of the Virgin, the twentieth century was lost in multiplicity and was best symbolized by the dynamo. As a result Adams reached the end of his years uncertain and saddened, but the author of one of the great intellectual self-portraits in American or any literature.

There are many other such life stories, each graphic and enriching in its own way. I have already cited Lincoln Steffens, the famous crusading journalist and muck-raker who began his career by refusing to accept conditions simply because they existed. And I have mentioned William Allen White, who developed from the editor of a small town newspaper, the *Emporia Gazette*, to a nationally famous commentator. White to the end of his days praised the virtues of the rural West, but filled his story with shrewd vignettes of political figures and writers which should be missed by no one interested in the twentieth century American scene. There are many more such books. Ludwig Lewisohn's *Up Stream*, for example, is a beautifully written account of a teacher making his way ahead despite the twin obstacles of foreign birth and membership in a racial minority. In careful detail Theodore Dreiser has told in *Newspaper Days* and *Dawn* the beginnings of his career as a writer. Hamlin Garland's Middle Border chronicles recount his life on the coulee farms of western Wisconsin and among the grainfields of Iowa and South Dakota. In *An Artist in America* Thomas Hart Benton has told with considerable vivacity the experiences of a painter in reaching and holding his public.

To such examples one might add the many books of journals, diaries, letters which are no less important in self-revelation than the more formal autobiographies. One thinks of the wonderful journals of Emerson and Thoreau, of Hawthorne's notebooks with their constant suggestions of plots and characters, of the letters of that great editor of our own day Maxwell Perkins advising and assuring authors who craved help, of the hasty but keen jottings of Ezra Pound to his fellow workers in poetry, of the rather stiff but fascinating epistles of that master of psychological biography, Gamaliel Bradford. No man could hope to experience all these people or their lives even if he lived far beyond the allotted three score and ten. But through literature he can know them sometimes almost better than they knew themselves.

IV

Fourth, American literature can widen one's mental perspective by bringing new ideas as well as new experiences, and it can provide stimulation, comfort, and solace. One need not accept Plato's theory that the rulers of a state must be philosophers or Shelley's dictum that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. Books do not need such extravagant claims to justify their authority. Yet one often fails to realize the intellectual impact of reading.

Thomas Henry Huxley once observed that the main achievement of the advance of physical science was not the superior comfort of man, but the fact that it had engineered a major revolution in the human mind—the substitution of doubt for authority, the conviction that reasoned proof was more important than blind faith. The moralist might disagree, and the world is never lacking in voices opposed to mere rationalism. But the point is that literature by exposing us to new ideas and different concepts invites dissent, encourages reexamination. No serious reader can fail to be moved by the speculations and theories of sincere thinkers, nor can his own mental horizon fail of expansion accordingly. Even if he does not deliberately seek new concepts, they are bound to appear and to be accepted or rejected as the reader's training and intelligence dictate. In these days of propaganda and advertising, literature is especially important as the meeting place of minds.

One thinks of Henry Thoreau, turning his back on his native village of Concord in 1845 to live for 26 months in a hut on the shores of Walden Pond in order to examine his way of life and perhaps to find the eternal truths. Eccentricity perhaps led

Thoreau to deny the value of postoffice or newspaper, perhaps even to prefer his own feet to railroads as a means of transportation, but his sturdy, penetrating mind saw at once that life has too much baggage and too many cares. Not many of us today can hear his gospel of simplicity. Not many of us would want to sacrifice luxuries and comforts so that we would be free to stroll four hours daily observing loons and pickerel and groundhogs, and the first spring flowers. It might be better for us if we did. And if the argument is heard that Thoreau's doctrine of individualism and personal review of laws is unrealistic, one might reply that Mahatma Gandhi did not think so. Civil disobedience on the shores of Walden Pond was transmuted, curiously enough, into passive resistance in an Indian jail.

Thoreau, the great rebel in American literature, not only preached the simple life but emphasized also the durable satisfactions to be derived from watching *nature*. Probably no other American has enjoyed more keenly the behavior of animals and birds or the miracles of plant life. The "poet-naturalist" his first biographer called Thoreau. The name was perfect. Even today the reader of *Walden* or the journals gets a sense of intimate communion with nature that is hard to equal elsewhere.

But Thoreau was not the only American with original ideas about the meaning and value of life. There was Henry George, committed for years to his doctrine of the abolition of all taxes save one, a tax on land, and the author of a book, *Progress and Poverty*, which brought the picture of economic inequality home to thousands of readers. There was Edward Bellamy, who through such utopian novels as *Looking Backward*, sketched his objections to the current social system in realistic terms. There was Thorstein Veblen, with his famous theory that the leisure class was wasteful and unjustifiable in any logically built society. There was John Fiske, who in a series of volumes brought to the American public the scientific and social theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. And there was John Dewey, probably the most famous educational thinker of our time, who introduced the concept of learning by doing and thus revolutionized the teaching of his day. Not all the absurdities of progressive education can be laid at Dewey's door, but certainly he led many a teacher out of his routine path.

Sometimes a man living from day to day without much sense that things are not all that they should be is shocked into alertness by exposure to a book which challenges what he has always

accepted. Such a book almost a century ago was Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*, or *The Gilded Age* of Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner. Each volume attacked sharply the complacency and the corruption of the era and pointed out the moral bankruptcy which was far worse in the minds of the authors than the tensions of reconstruction. Whitman's book was especially striking since the poet's general views about America and its destiny were gallantly optimistic, but he was too honest a man to be happy about the life of his time and too forthright a writer to conceal his dissatisfaction. The Twain-Warner novel, moreover, was so strong an indictment of sham and fraud that its very title, "The Gilded Age," has become synonymous with the period which it pilloried.

But it might be well to end on a more peaceful note. American literature can also bring to the jaded or tormented reader a sense of calm and contentment. While not rich in quietly meditative writing, not to be expected perhaps in a culture which has had more force and aggressiveness than polish, our literature has not lacked the conviction of the good life. The nature poets from William Cullen Bryant to Robert Frost have emphasized the fascination of the out-of-doors world and the pleasure to be derived from studying the fragile beauty of the fringed gentian or the slant of birches on a rocky hillside. Probably no one ever saw a garden quite as Emily Dickinson did, or became as excited as she about an angle-worm or a hummingbird or a robin in her path on a dewy morning. It is hard to forget the enthusiasm with which John Burroughs described bird calls or the rapture of John Muir's descriptions of the California Sierras. Indeed the tradition of writing about nature, writing which is both informed and intelligent, is one of the best-marked paths in American literature.

If one wishes, however, to seek a writer who can both challenge and soothe, who brings to his books a wide knowledge of ideas and personalities and yet who is neither numbed by the past nor overly concerned with the transient, there is no better example than Ralph Waldo Emerson. He was a moralist, not a philosopher, an observer, not a participant, yet a man who was surprisingly conscious of change and progress, and who preserved an even keel despite blustery winds and unexpected cross-currents. To Emerson the individual was of paramount importance. Social reform was futile unless man began with self-reform. Emerson was sympathetic with all the social experiments of his day, with abolitionism, with feminism, with the temperance movement, with the improvement of the wages and working hours of the laborer, but he always

distrusted external forces. As the title of his most famous essay, "Self-Reliance," implies, Emerson was concerned chiefly with the dignity and power and self-trust of the individual man. This was the conviction which led him to interpret all history as biography and to define an institution as simply the lengthened shadow of a man. Man to Emerson could find truth through intuition and could solve his problems by trusting his conscience. No American writer has had a grander idea of human nobility than Ralph Waldo Emerson, and none has expressed this idea better than Emerson in such essays as "The American Scholar," *Nature*, "The Poet," "Experience," and "Illusions."

* * * *

I have indicated, then, four ways in which American literature affects and reveals American culture. In the future the revelation of our culture in books will be greater, not less. No thinking person can afford to overlook our written record. In the words of Walt Whitman,

"The United States themselves are
essentially the greatest poem."

The writers I have discussed have all sought in various ways to transfer that poem to the printed page.

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS

You may use the form on the back cover for the renewal of your membership in the I. A. T. E. Remember that, as a member, next year you will receive a copy of the literary map of Illinois, described on page

Please renew now so that the Association need not send you a reminder.

When you send in your renewal, why not send also a gift membership for some other English teacher who is not at present in the I. A. T. E.? If you do so this spring, your friend will be sent the April and May issues, as well as next year's issues and the literary map. Few gifts could be more appropriate for an English teacher.

A Science for Democratic Answers

By ELSIE KATTERJOHN

Waukegan Township High School

Few teachers would contest the statement that our public schools now face challenging tasks in preparing pupils for significant living. Yet, though dissatisfaction with current educational programs is widespread, equally rife is confusion as to what should be done. We do not know how to ask the right questions to arrive at right answers about right actions.

In times of need, Providence grants to the world an Edison or an Einstein. In the present educational crisis, the celestial gift may well be Bulletin Number Seven of the ISSCP,¹ which in form and style bears more likeness to the theory of relativity than to the incandescent lamp; but which this reviewer feels offers an important and workable answer to a question raised in the preface: "How can planning-meetings of the faculty generate more light and less heat?"

The book might be described as a manual on social engineering. A compilation of selected readings from 25 different writers—psychologists, social scientists, educators—bulletin Seven is designed to help individuals work happily and productively as group members, in planning and evaluating curriculum changes. It is thoroughly indexed. Administrators, supervisors, group leaders and other participants will all find important theories, practical methods, and practice examples included.

Changes in curriculum, the authors advise, will not be accomplished on a stabilized basis unless scientific change-procedures are followed. Before single items in the curriculum can be adjusted to modern needs, group atmosphere must be altered: group members must experience democratic organization, with attendant responsibilities, in replacement of either the autocratic directive or the individualistic-freedom approach to curriculum problems; leaders and other participants must be trained in a

¹ Benne, Kenneth D., and Muntyan, Bozidar, *Human Relations in Curriculum Change, Selected Readings with Special Emphasis on Group Development*, a Publication of the Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program, Circular Series A, No. 51, Bulletin No. 7, Authority of the State of Illinois, June, 1949.

science of human engineering that will allow both for satisfaction of individual needs and for gain to the group from the contributions of all. This hypothesis speaks, of course, from the heart of democratic ethics, and reminds us that the democratic values, if they are to be maintained and extended through our present industrial culture, might profitably be seeded in the processes of our public schools.

It is interesting to note, in connection with the democratic viewpoint, the authors' comments on patterns of reaching decisions about curriculum changes. Compromise, they point out, is not the ideal democratic method. It may be necessary in certain short-run situations, but for long-range planning and curriculum change it is unsatisfactory. Changes that are to become stabilized must come about through intelligent consensus, uncoerced, rather than through compromise. Compromise involves equality of power but diversity of purpose. In situations of compromise, the conflicting opinions remain unchanged. There is no mind-growth. On the contrary, if trained efforts are made to develop a common outlook through skilled discussion, study, and deliberation, the conflict may be resolved, all coming to accept the resolution as their own.

However, if consensus is to be reached, they warn that careful methods of deliberation must be used. Without training in such methods, and their application throughout curriculum planning, teachers will not have the opportunity to satisfy their own personal needs for security and success; and unless such needs are met, consequent frustration sets in, symptomized by backbiting, irritability, and general inability to work with others. Consensus then becomes impossible. Even the curriculum change that is seemingly accepted is in danger of backswing unless the change has been brought about through intelligent application of democratic procedures.

Democracy, we are reminded, does not eliminate leadership from the curriculum group. Group work is, in fact, facilitated by a leader who uses methods of democratic deliberation. Appropriate functions for status leaders are listed as follows: (1) improving human relations within the group; (2) furnishing expertness along certain lines; (3) generating leadership in others; (4) coordinating the efforts of others.

Many of the techniques of scientific deliberation described in Bulletin Seven would be useful with students in the classroom. However, our purpose here is to consider the problems of curriculum change. Since space available will not permit coverage of all the helps offered, sampling has been limited to a few deliberative

procedures necessary in the earlier steps of training face-to-face discussion groups.

General Pattern for a Group Meeting

"Group thinking is best thought of as organized effort on the part of the membership to locate, define, and solve its common problems."² Here is a simple outline of the process to be followed:

1. Survey the problems.
2. Clarify them.
3. Select one which the group comes to feel is important and which it can hope to solve.

Early establishment of a permissive atmosphere is important. The leader sets the tone of informality and ease by his or her own manner. Perhaps the group is then asked to make some decisions about work procedures, such as where and when to meet and how long. This practice suggests that group opinions count. Any decisions the leader makes should be labeled as open to revision.

A problem census follows in which the members' various gripes and difficulties are listed on the board. At this point the leader should avoid judgments on the part of anyone in the group, confining himself to insuring that each member is in some way represented in the list. If the list grows long and discouraging, grouping of problems may be suggested, even as an outside task if time is limited. In the re-listing, the original wording of the "gripe" should be retained if possible.

Selection of the first problem to be solved should be made by the group. (Compromise is perhaps necessary here.) The one selected should be a "common" problem and one that the group can do something about. Working together, the group should then set clear, tentative goals and sub-goals for short and long-term action. These should be reviewed, from meeting to meeting, for continuity and direction in progress. Each meeting should bring a feeling of accomplishment and some decision or action by the group.

A quick, helpful way to improve group meetings is offered in this End-of-Meeting Suggestion Slip:³

What did you think of this meeting? Please be frank. Your comments can contribute a great deal both to the conference and the profession. Our group observers will pool all the suggestions and summarize them for us.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 65-67.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

1. How did you feel about this meeting? (Check)
 No good Mediocre All right Good Excellent
2. What were the weaknesses?
3. What were the strong points?
4. What improvements would you suggest in the operations of the next meeting?

(Do Not Sign Your Name)

Results should be tabulated and reported back to the group.

Changing the pattern of group meetings from authoritarian or *laissez faire* to a constructive democratic pattern, it is admitted may cause degrees of frustration at first—even of resentment at the leader's seeming withdrawal from responsibility. In another phase, members may be strongly divided on relegation of authority rights. Adjustment is a matter of growth through various phases, toward the mature, ongoing phase in which members sense direction toward a goal, are aware of the rate of progress, and recognize their location on the path to the goal.

Other definite signs characterize the mature group. It has the ability to look at, criticize, and improve its own procedures. The group can set goals and subgoals, re-adjusting them as necessary. It can usually reach a common decision. Leadership is shared as described below:⁴

“A number of people talk freely about a matter of common concern. *A* proposes a plan of action. *B* successfully voices objection and criticism. *C* then proposes a modified plan. *D*, *E*, and *F* criticize certain features of this plan. The group at this point divides, seemingly unable to agree. *G* then comes forward with a new plan that combines the desired features and avoids the evils feared. The group agree. Here *A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, *E*, and *F* criticize certain features of this plan. The group

The immature group, in contrast, has little awareness of its own procedures, or of the relationships between proceedings and productivity. Direction seems undefined, and discussion may go in several directions at once.

Group Roles in Curriculum Change

In whatever stage of development as a group member, the reader will find entertaining and helpful the descriptions of constructive responsibility-roles enacted interchangeably and flexibly by people involved in curriculum change.⁵

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-95.

Group Task Roles: Initiator-contributor, information seeker, opinion seeker, information giver, opinion giver, elaborator, coordinator, orienter, evaluator-critic, energizer, procedural technician, recorder.

Maintenance Roles: Encourager, harmonizer, compromiser, gate-keeper and expeditor, standard setter, group-observer and commentator, follower.

Enlightening, too, are the following destructive roles which are listed as indicating individually-centered rather than group-centered participation:

Destructive Roles: Aggressor, blocker, recognition seeker, self-confessor, playboy, dominator, help seeker, special interest pleader.

Consciousness of group roles is emphasized throughout the book as a major value.

Team Organization for Discussion Groups

Increasingly, the leading of a discussion group is being interpreted as a team job. A frequent team-pattern is that of leader, recorder, and observer. With the more mature groups, these jobs may satisfactorily be rotated. Sometimes groups call in a resource person or consultant, too—an expert in the field of their discussion.

The work of the leader has been briefly summarized in an earlier paragraph. The recorder keeps a record of the content of the discussion, so that he can help the group summarize and focus its thinking from time to time. The observer watches group behavior, noting work atmosphere, discussion practices, etc. Later he feeds back to the group his ideas about what happened, so that the group can evaluate its discussion methods and work for improvement. The expert, or resource person, may help members define and select problems, analyze barriers, or form a program of action. He joins the group to answer questions, not to lecture. He should, of course, be briefed before coming into the group.

Importance of Evaluation Sessions

Evaluation sessions, often based on the feedback from an observer, are rated as of particular value in changing techniques and behaviors and in improving group-feeling. Groups doing self-evaluation should cover three general steps: (1) get a common agreement on what actually happened; (2) analyze reasons behind the happenings; (3) suggest ways of improving procedure in the future. A sample of a feedback is furnished in the bulletin.

Such criteria as the following, quoted in part, are set up to help groups evaluate their discussion processes.⁶ If the answers are more to the "yes" side than to the "no," then democracy has set in.

Does every member make contributions to the discussion?

Is every member intensely involved in the discussion at all stages?

Does the discussion move toward common agreements in terms of the problem?

Does the group accept and understand the conflicts encountered and move toward their resolution?

Does the group recognize its need for information? Does it know how to go about getting such information?

Does the group use resource persons or resource material as an aid to its own thinking, not as giving the final action-solution?

Is the group unduly dependent upon its leader or on some of its members?

Is there an atmosphere of friendly cooperation in the group at all times, particularly when conflicts of ideas and points of view are encountered?

Is there a feeling of progress toward common goals?

Training Groups in Better Procedures

All who are interested in improving the productivity of curriculum groups will be interested in the blueprints for action with which this compilation of social theory and practice will fortify them. One writer voices the consensus of these authors:⁷

"Establishing democracy in a group implies an active education. The democratic follower has to learn to play a role which implies . . . a fair share of responsibility toward the group and a sensitivity to other people's feelings. . . .

"What holds for the education of democratic followers holds true also for the education of democratic leaders. In fact, it seems to be the same process through which persons learn to play either of these roles and it seems that both roles must be learned if either one is to be played well."

If a group is to become an effective producing unit, the members must master such skills as the following: how to contribute to collective thinking, how to elicit effective individual contribu-

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

tions from all members, how to define a problem, how to work toward consensus, how to recognize tension and disintegration, etc. Such skills, the authors feel, are best learned in a laboratory situation, in which the group actually functions during the training period.

Various devices are suggested for sensitizing a group to their errors in functioning, and for bringing about improvements. One is the demonstration of two stages of group maturity. Another is the use of the group observer, feedback, and evaluation session, with trained personnel operating in the early stages. For adjustment of attitudes and appreciation of varying viewpoints, the technique of role-playing as in sociodrama and psychodrama is recommended, again under skilled direction at first. Materials in this area are presented in detail.

* * * * *

The magnitude and depth of the whole treatment in Bulletin Seven is so far beyond the possible scope of this review that readers interested in the problem of human relations should obtain a copy for direct examination. Do not, however, plan to sample the material at those times when you are too weary to grade your English papers. The present reviewer, habituated to the selection of pages for the retarded reader, breathed uneasily the rarified atmosphere of pure thought and scientific phraseology.

Nevertheless, it is an important writing, well worth the effort as a voluntary "home course." Its argument makes a definite impact on one's view of group participation, and leads to personal resolves. It leaves one feeling that there is a comparatively simple road through chaos—an ordered pathway to curriculum changes, and that there are interesting things to do and see all along the way.

Minutes of the 1951 Spring Meeting of the Executive Board of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English

At 10:00 a.m., March 17, 1951, in Carson's dining room in Chicago, Miss Addie Hochstrasser, president, called to order the spring meeting of the executive board of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. Minutes of the 1950 fall meeting were read and approved.

The treasurer's report, given by Dr. Roberts, and approved, showed a balance of \$938.39 in the treasurer's account and \$124.31 in the *Bulletin* account.

In his report Dr. Roberts suggested printed letterhead stationery, showing names of officers, which can be secured for approximately thirty dollars a thousand. He also suggested that such stationery be used for promotional letters to come out this spring. The group agreed to the suggestion that remaining issues of the *Bulletin* for the current year be offered as a bonus for taking out new memberships in the spring.

To the roll call of district representatives, given by Mr. Wilmer Lamar for Miss Hila Stone, fourteen answered present.

Miss Lois Dilley, Association representative on the I.S.S.C.P., reported the work of four panels in the January conference to discover the needs and prepare a guide to the defense program of the schools of Illinois: Panel I estimating the defense situation, Panel II drawing out the implications of these findings for education, Panel III determining how to relate them to the field of English, and Panel IV reporting findings of teachers in other departments. The trial copy of the pamphlet "Guide to the Defense Program for the Schools of Illinois" reports the work of the January conference and is to be criticized by a number of people in the March conference.

Dr. Hook, editor of the *Bulletin*, reported next, saying that a questionnaire has been sent to district leaders asking for suggestions for possible improvement of the *Bulletin*.

Dr. Hook displayed a literary map of North Carolina, published by the North Carolina Association of Teachers of English, and raised the question of whether or not such a project would be worth while for our Association. After some discussion it was moved

by Miss Hazel Anderson and carried that we publish a literary map of Illinois, perhaps as an issue of the *Bulletin*, and empower the president to appoint a committee to aid Dr. Hook in preparing the map.

Dr. Roberts then displayed a map showing membership in the Association in the districts of Illinois, suggesting that copies of such a map be sent to leaders and administrators as a promotional device.

Miss Liesette McHarry, chairman of the curriculum committee, reported that all members of the committee have made their summaries or reviews, and that they are now appearing in the *Bulletin*.

When new business was called for, Dr. DeBoer stated that the Illinois Council for the Social Studies had asked for our help in opposing the House Bill (McClintock and others) which provides that "the Superintendent of Public Instruction . . . has the authority and responsibility of supervising the evaluation and classification of all teaching materials used in courses of instruction in the social sciences in the public schools." Miss Helen Stapp of Decatur reported action of other educational organizations regarding the bill. It was moved by Miss Alice Grant of West Frankfort, seconded and passed, that the secretary be instructed to send a resolution opposing the bill to the proper authorities.

The motion made by Miss Hazel Anderson that the Illinois Association of Teachers of English have a booth at the National Council meeting in Cincinnati this fall was carried.

When the president turned the meeting over to the program chairman, Miss Alice Grant, she introduced Dr. DeBoer, who talked on the Curriculum Revision and Citizenship Education Program, and presented several questions, related to the program, vital to teachers of English. A general discussion resulted. In answer to Miss Isabelle Hoover's question, "How can teachers of English exercise their influence more effectively in the program?" Dr. DeBoer suggested that the Association have a committee on common learnings to consult with Miss Dilley so that she may be able to speak for the organization. No action was taken.

Upon the adjournment of the board meeting the group joined the English Club of Greater Chicago in a luncheon meeting at Carson's at which Dr. E. K. Brown of the University of Chicago talked on Willa Cather.

EDITH GROOM, *Secretary*

ENGLISH INVENTORIES

The I. S. S. C. P. has recently undertaken a series of "Area Consensus Studies." The purpose of these studies is to assist local schools and school systems to find points of agreement with respect to the objectives and procedures employed in the various subject fields or "areas." Studies of the extra-class program, guidance, and family living are well under way.

The procedure of the studies involves the use of a series of "inventories" prepared under the direction of a committee or "jury." In English, the members of the "jury" are: Wilmer Lamar, of Decatur, and Maureen Self, of Jacksonville, representing the Illinois Association of Teachers of English; Catherine Parks, representing the office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction; William G. Brink, representing Northwestern University; Gordon Ray, Charles W. Roberts, Harold Hand, and John J. DeBoer, representing the University of Illinois; Owen B. Wright, Rock Island, representing the Illinois Association of Secondary School Principals; and John D. Mees, representing the I. S. S. C. P. Inventory A is used by faculties and community leaders to discover initial points of agreements. Inventory B measures changes in viewpoint after discussion. Inventory C asks what methods should be employed to achieve the agreed-upon objectives. Only those schools and school systems which request the forms will participate in the study. The plan of the study emphasizes the strictly voluntary and grass-roots approach of the I. S. S. C. P.

Announcement will be made later of the availability of the Inventories.

WANT A COMPANION?

Are you looking for a congenial friend to travel with this summer? Do you want an English-teacher roommate at a summer session? Do you want a pen pal? No, the I. A. T. E. is not becoming a lonely hearts club, but Miss Margaret Newman has volunteered to try to bring together pairs of English teachers who have mutual interests. Address her at Elgin High School, Elgin, Illinois. Enclose a stamped envelope.

LITERARY MAP OF ILLINOIS

As the secretary's minutes printed in this issue indicate, the executive board of the I. A. T. E. recently approved publication of a literary map of Illinois, showing birthplaces of Illinois authors, scenes from fiction or poetry which has Illinois as its locale, and other materials of literary interest. The map will be a large one in four colors, illustrated with drawings, and suitable for framing. Every English classroom in Illinois should have one.

It is the present plan to send a free copy of this map sometime next year to each member of the I. A. T. E. It will be sold in bookstores for \$1.50.

Here is how you can help if you have a class hour that you can spare. Will you discuss with your students which authors from your section of the state, or which books with settings in your area, are worthy of inclusion? Naturally not all Illinois authors or all books about Illinois can be included, but which are so important that they should not be excluded? One thinks immediately of Sandburg, Masters, and Hemingway, but what other writers of high caliber should be represented? Here is the basis for a lively discussion that will be genuinely helpful in the preparation of the map. Please send your students' recommendations, and your own, to the editor by June 10.

RENEW NOW FOR 1951-1952

T

Date _____

To C. W. ROBERTS
204-A Lincoln Hall
Urbana, Illinois

I am paying \$2.00 annual membership dues to the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. This also pays for a year's subscription to the Bulletin.

Name _____

Address _____

(Please fill out both cards)

E

Date _____

To C. W. ROBERTS
204-A Lincoln Hall
Urbana, Illinois

I am paying \$2.00 annual membership dues to the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. This also pays for a year's subscription to the Bulletin.

Name _____

Address _____

